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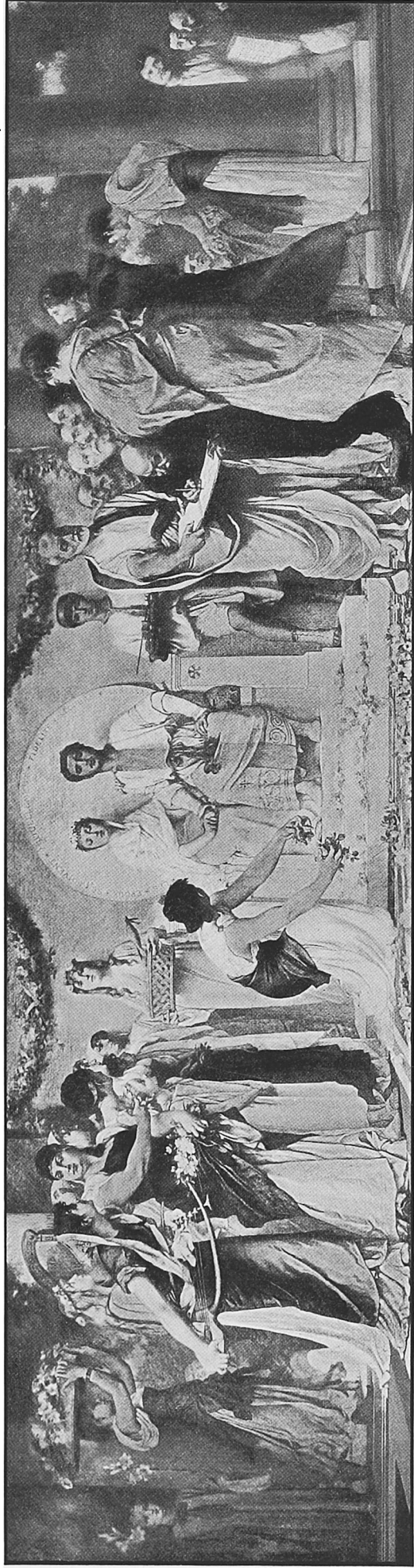
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A GREAT CIVIC DECORATION IN THE MARRIAGE HALL OF THE
THIRTEENTH ARRONDISSEMENT, PARIS



"MARRIAGE"
BY BOULANGER

(See opposite page)

ANALYSIS OF WORKS OF ART

By *Petronius Arbiter*

OUR STANDARD

The logical Standard of Art Measurement for a sure evaluation of works of art is based: on rare examples of the highest manifestations of the Six Elements of Art Power.

That is to say: The greatest work of art in the world is that one in which we see manifested:

First: A Subject which is Socially the most beneficent, of interest to the greatest number of people, and the noblest in Conception.

Second: In which the Expression: on the faces of the figures, in the details, and in the work as a whole—expresses profoundly that which the work is supposed to express.

Third: In which the Composition is the most sublime.

Fourth: In which the Drawing of all forms is the most true and effective in rendering Life, above all—Ideal Life.

Fifth: In which the Color is the most varied and rich.

Sixth: In which the surface Technique is the most vigorous, appropriate, and unoffensively individual; the whole work of such a Quality, and so coordinated, as to insure a result, in which a Subject is expressed with the greatest Completeness and Harmony: so as to stir the highest emotions of the largest number of cultured people for the longest period of time.

We consider a work of art great or trivial in ratio of the degree to which it measures up to this standard.

A GREAT CIVIC DECORATION

"MARRIAGE"

By BOULANGER

(See opposite page)

FRANCE has given the world many first principles and fecund primary thoughts which have been exploited by others. Hence it is surprising that one of her finest ideas has never been imitated by our American cities. We refer to that worked out in Paris of dividing the city into twenty wards or *arrondissements* as they are called, each having its more or less palatial mayor's office or *mairie*, containing a mayor and various assistants. All of the mayors and aides meet at the principal Mayor's office in the magnificent central Hôtel de Ville, where they make general laws for the entire city.

In these ward halls the mayors with their aides make rules that apply to their wards, which are often subdivided into "Quartiers" or sections. The result is, every ward has a center which stimulates civic life to a higher degree of activity than would otherwise be the case, since there is a generous rivalry between each ward for efficiency in administration.

In the Ward-hall the citizen of each ward transacts his affairs. There he has his birth recorded; there he is married, meets, pays his taxes, votes; there his wife can leave her babies to be cared for while she goes shopping or working in the neighborhood.

Imagine this idea adopted by New York and the city divided into twenty Wards, each having a fine Ward-hall where the citizens could transact all his civic business: where he could get married, and from which he could be buried; where he could have a fine civic library for his use, also a hall for music, lectures and dances; where he could vote, pay taxes and have meetings of all kinds—to protest or approve—each Ward-hall so magnificent as to be an inspiration to the citizen who passes by or crosses its portals! Would these not stimulate the interest of townsfolk in their wards to a degree not even thought of now? We have suggested this idea elsewhere before, and we trust that, when this war is over, the idea will be taken up by the city and

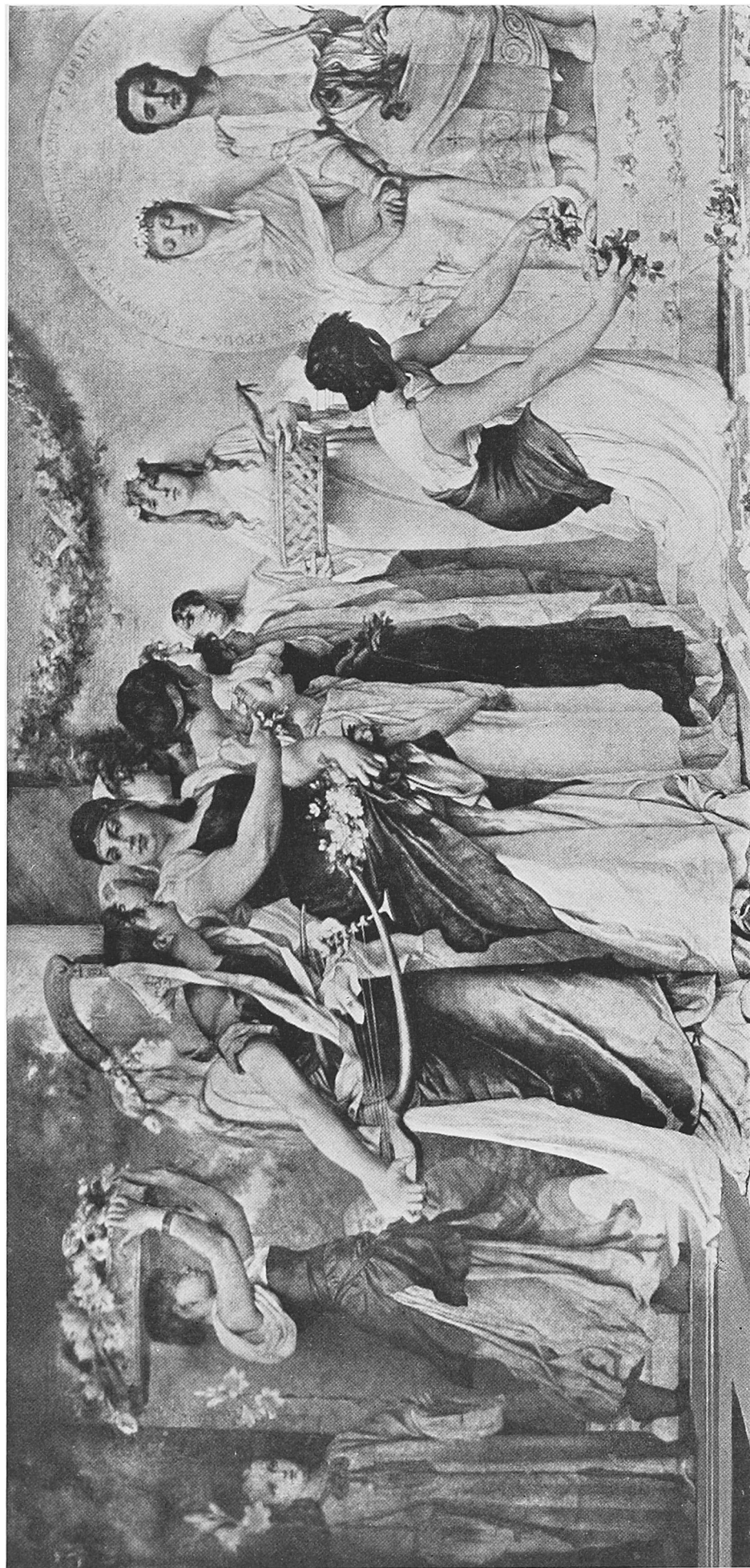
worked out in harmony with the life and habits of New York.

These Halls would stimulate art of the highest order in architecture, sculpture and painting to such a degree as would rejoice the heart of every lover of municipal betterment and of the beautiful.

One of the finest of the twenty Paris Ward-halls is the *Mairie du Treizième Arrondissement* or that of the thirteenth ward, facing the Place d'Italie. Like the rest of them, this one has its Marriage Hall, in which the citizens of the thirteenth ward must be married in order to make their marriage legal and binding. In this *mairie* are decorations by Boulanger—the finest civic decorations perhaps to be found in Paris: "The Family," "Labor," "Patriotism" and "Marriage," the latter, the largest of the four, being about thirty feet long by about six feet high. Note the illustrations on pages 44, 46 and 47.

Marriage is estimated in different ways by different peoples in different countries and epochs. Some regard it as a merely civil and material relation entered into principally in the interest of the State. Others believe it to be a divine and religious contract entered into for the highest interests of the race, as the church sees that interest. Some consider it a purely personal affair; others an impeding yoke, still others an advancing force. Some advocate "trial marriages" to be severed at will; others, as in South Carolina, refuse divorces for any cause.

But, however the extreme social experimenters may squabble about it, common-sense says—that not only is marriage with the concomitant family the corner-stone of any durable political organization that will save the race from extinction, but that it should be regarded as the purest, most poetic and holiest relation a man or woman can assume on earth, and that a higher stage of civilization is



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unattainable until we place the marriage relation on that lofty level. That the French Government and people regard it thus is proven by the fact that they encourage marriage by every means, make it the most important act a citizen can perform and surround it with great pomp and respect, also with the utmost safeguards possible—under a government of common-sense liberty.

Nearly all the marriage halls in Paris are decorated with symbolic pictures or sculptures having reference to the family, home, labor, patriotism, etc. What singles out the decorations of the marriage hall in the thirteenth ward is the fact that Boulanger's decoration of "Marriage," here illustrated, is not only one of the largest but one of the noblest civic decorations made in recent days. At the time the writer was in Paris good photographs of these decorations could not be obtained in the shops. He was therefore compelled to get a special permission from the government and have it photographed at his own expense, and so far as known the decorations have not been reproduced in this country before.

Here we have supra-Academic art. That is to say: here we have the common-sense mingling of the personal with the impersonal, the individual with the universal; that is, a work showing the personal *craftsmanship* of the artist, capable of interesting the local public of Paris for a decade, and an impersonal *style of composition* and treatment that will interest the public of the world for centuries to come. Here we have an entire absence of any *peculiarity* of drawing or construction or painting, or of any self-parading by any fanciful or egotistic tricks of mannerism. Nothing has been introduced to weaken the supreme purpose—the profound expression of the main idea. No weird, cryptic symbolism bewilders us. All is clear and understandable. Therefore the work operates freely upon our soul and thus quickly stirs our emotions—which is the first essential in all great art.

Properly speaking, this should be called Naturalistic art, because of the *naturalness* of every element in the entire work which lifts it above the merely "Academic." It meets entirely Bacon's definition:

Art is man added to nature.

Also it fills Shakespeare's demands:

To hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.

In other words, as a mirror does not reflect nature exactly in the way it appears to our eyes, as it is impossible to reproduce nature by any means exactly as it appears, here we have that *relative* truth to nature of which we have so often spoken, without being photographic truth. Here we have just enough "departure from the truth of nature and the commonplace" to give to the work as a whole and to every figure a certain modest and fine style, but not enough of a departure to invest it with any extravagance of style. It is in fact one of the finest examples of what the French call the Grand Style. Everything is so natural that one feels that the entire action might be going on in real life as it does in the picture. Yet we feel that

the action is going on in another world, on a higher plane, in an ideal environment.

Here we have an absence of that "highfalutin" art with a big A upon which the ego-maniacal "individualists" set so much store—bespattered all over with catspaw marks of the song-and-dance technical stunting of the artist—the absence of which in such work as this makes them scorn it as "academic"—the meaning of which word they do not understand. In reality we have here the highest kind of art, that is: art which conceals art, and spurns all artifices of "deformation of the form," etc., such as make the cultured layman gape and ask himself: "Am I insane or is the artist crazy?"

Here we have a work that looks as if any very great artist might have created it, because of the entire absence of any factitious peculiarities of brushwork or workmanship of any kind. And yet it does radiate a personal flavor, but one as delicate as a tea-rose and as charming. Because those who know Boulanger's work recognize this as his handiwork. It is that which gives it its universal and enduring character. Being above all technical faddisms it will outlive all fads and because of its unaffected naturalness be applauded a thousand years from now as much as it is to-day. Like Shakespeare's "Hamlet" it is.

Not of an age, but for all time.

There is no work in the history of art in which the *conception* of the marriage relation is more lofty or spiritual. It is not a commonplace wedding, but an apotheosis of marriage by the enthronement on a marble throne of a couple clothed in marriage robes of white—the whole central part being white suggests the purity of the relation of marriage.

As a part of the conception notice the choice of a handsome, vigorous type of young Frenchman, the typical, charming French girl, the young girl on the left holding a basket with a distaff as a symbol of home-keeping, the boy on the right with book, hammer and sword to symbolize education, labor and defense of home and country. Note the fine types of the men who are witnesses to the marriage, the attractive women and that fine type of a little girl carrying two lilies, symbol of spirituality.

Observe that the marriage does not take place in a private house but in a public temple, intimating thereby that marriage is not a personal business but an affair of supreme importance to the State—which is the highest view to take of the relation.

As a *composition*, it is on a par with the most beautiful friezes of Veronese. Here we have a savant combination of those three elements of beauty in composition: the *angular* and picturesque lines—which gently jostle and amuse us; the *serpentine* and graceful lines which gently *cradle* and *delight* us; and the *pyramidal* masses which *lift* and *exalt* us. Note the angular lines in the marble throne, the serpentine lines throughout the figures and how skilful, yet not over-obviously, Boulanger has pyramidalized not only the central group but the whole frieze, making out of it an exalting composition in spite of its being a frieze—a masterly intellectual feat.

As to its *drawing*, it is of that superb kind,

so free from all foolish peculiarities that we do not notice the drawing and found only in the finest works of the old masters—firm yet supple, true yet not photographic, full of the expression of that sense of movement in muscle and direction so difficult to obtain. How skilfully is the beautifully composed drapery drawn! How sculpturesque each figure!

The magnificence of the *color scheme* unfortunately we can not reproduce. But even the poor reproductions we give show a variety and a richness of color rivaling that of the greatest art of the past.

And as for *technic* or painting—even the reproductions show that throughout the immense canvas Boulanger maintained his *values*, and so well that the work has atmosphere—that is, one might be able to walk round each figure—so airy does the whole work seem, and this is the most difficult quality for a painter to achieve in a picture where there are many figures and details. Therefore technically it is from every point of view a great masterpiece of workmanship, impeccable in every detail.

Finally let us come to the element of *expression*—the most important in any work of art. Here every face and figure expresses that which it is supposed to express, so that those who are studying the wedded couple self-respectingly submitting to the ordeal, and those who are engaged in their several actions, are simply alive. There is nothing fantastic about the drawing or painting to interfere with the completest expression of the idea by making us wonder why the painter resorted to this or that “personal” or extravagant mannerism. Thus each figure helps to tell the story simply, clearly and completely. But besides this perfect expression of each figure—which we call *primary expression*—there is a *secondary expression*, that is the expression of the work as a whole. As to this, note first the air of dignity and at the same time a certain French restrained gaiety; but above everything else an all-pervading purity and spirituality, which radiates not only from the entire work but especially from the central group and the circular sun-like back of the marble throne. On this we read:

HUSBAND AND WIFE OWE ONE ANOTHER MUTUAL
FIDELITY, HELP AND ASSISTANCE.

As the women folk are carrying the good things and musical instruments for the wedding feast to follow after the ceremony, while the parents are signing the necessary legal documents, with what a lofty expression, as if decided to devote themselves to the higher interests of the race—does this heroically beautiful couple face the world as they fondly grasp hands in a pledge that bespeaks a pure and spiritual love, loyalty and high devotion such as can not be found in any other allegory of marriage on earth!

Here we have perhaps the greatest example in the world of a sermon to all mankind which yet does not pretend to be, and is not suspected of being, a sermon—until after our soul has been lifted to the highest ethical point of view possible to a citizen. It is that which makes it all the more powerful as a sermon. Who will say after this that “art has

nothing to do with morals?” Who will hereafter stupidly pretend that one can not suggest and inculcate in art the loftiest lessons in life without being dull?

It is in front of this suggestive and spiritual sermon of exalting beauty that those who are married in this Hall and their friends are forced to sit—long enough to contemplate and absorb the elevated ideal of marriage which this picture symbolizes. And none can do so without resolving highly to mount to that lofty level, without asking for strength enough to reach and remain there.

The marriage-hall of this mairie, by reason of this great picture and the artist's other three: “The Family,” “Labor” and “Patriotism” has been made a sanctuary, a veritable civic temple and a constant source of good citizenship. It was made so because Boulanger was not only a great artist, but a great citizen.

After sitting, in company with a friend, in long and silent contemplation of this sublime creation, we were more and more lifted into a poetic mood by the exalting atmosphere and exquisite beauty which radiated through the Hall until, when we softly asked our companion: “What do you think of it?” tears came to his eyes and to his lips just one word “Immortal!”

It may interest our readers to know that the faces of the men to the right of the picture are all portraits of famous artists. Among these we recognize the white-bearded Guillaume, great sculptor, holding the book of registration; next to him the painter François; then, in profile, Flandrin, who painted the superb decorations in the church of St. Germain; then, full face, the white-bearded Cabanel looking at Gérôme; to his right Baudry who painted the decorations in the Paris Opera House; then the sculptor Falguière (?); then Garnier with the Indian-like profile, the great architect who built the Paris Opera House and Monte Carlo. The rest are problems except the last man, in profile: that is a good likeness of the artist Boulanger himself.

Dear Boulanger! how his pupils at Julien's, in spite of his severity, loved him! Because of his unflinching sincerity and sense of justice and an evident aim to lift art—that of his pupils as well as his own—to the highest plane. And with joy we bring to him this posthumous tribute and say: “Dear Master, in giving to your country this sublime allegory of Marriage you have ennobled your Fatherland, helped to place France where she belongs—in the forefront of civilization, and assured yourself of an ever-increasing affection in the hearts of mankind.”

It is the continued creation by great Frenchmen, with an intellectual power and finesse rarely manifested in the past; it is the steady accumulation in France of such ennobling and immortal masterpieces of art, by the side of and above the by-product of ephemeral things often so clever and charming, which render France so unfailingly interesting to people of culture, and make it the loved second fatherland of every man with eyes capable of seeing, a mind fitted to judge and a soul able to respond to exalting emotions.